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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TBILISI 000674

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [RS](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: GEORGIA: GOOD AND BAD NEWS FROM EUMM

REF: A. MOSCOW 778
[1](#)B. TBILISI 484
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Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary and comment. In a recent trip to Moscow, EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) representatives heard that Russia and South Ossetia have taken steps toward establishing an Incident Prevention Mechanism (Abkhazia still awaits a new UN mandate). According to the EUMM, Russia expressed interest in another Geneva meeting in late May, which is better than the current plan of June, but still late. The EUMM refuted further Russian and South Ossetian allegations of a Georgian military buildup. Although the Russian military finally provided local contacts to EUMM, it showed little interest in responding to other EUMM concerns, and in preparation for Georgian opposition-led protests on April 9 in Tbilisi, it reported that Russian forces in Akhalkori will be doubled in strength. EUMM determined that an armored vehicle could have prevented the fatality that occurred in the March 29 IED attack, and the Interior Ministry is now using COBRAs more widely; EUMM monitors themselves were shot at on March 26 in Ditsi. Although the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs requested that EUMM staff monitor the April 9 protests, Brussels decided against it, so only a liaison officer will observe developments from inside the Ministry; EUMM will send extra patrols to the boundaries that day. Steps by Russia and, to a lesser extent, South Ossetia toward cooperation are welcome, but the real test will be April 9, when many fear provocations near the boundaries. We will have to pay close attention to the buildup of Russian forces in the Akhalkori Valley, which is the portion of South Ossetia nearest Tbilisi. End summary and comment.

THE (MOSTLY) GOOD NEWS

[1](#)2. (C) At the weekly EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) briefing for diplomats on April 2, Deputy Head of Mission Gilles Janvier and his staff offered an update of the situation on the ground, and Political Advisor Rosaria Puglisi offered a readout of the trip she, Head of Mission Hansjoerg Haber, and EU Special Representative Pierre Morel recently made to Moscow (ref A). Janvier reported that the EUMM has established more regular contact with local Russian commanders, which EUMM has been seeking in vain for several months. Puglisi reported that the Russians gave positive signals on the implementation of the Incident Prevention Mechanism negotiated at the February round of the Geneva talks (refs B, C). Not only did the Russians name two liaison officers as Russia's representatives to the Mechanism (although they did not yet have phone numbers), but the South Ossetians did so as well. The Russians indicated they hoped to hold an initial session of the mechanism by April 15. Puglisi was planning on meeting with Georgian Deputy Foreign Minister Giga Bokeria in the near future to discuss details; the Georgians have not yet agreed to some proposed

arrangements, including the South Ossetian de facto preference to hold the session in so-called "no-man's land" on the administrative boundary in Ergneti. Two other unresolved issues are the establishment of an agenda and a chair for the sessions. (On April 6, Puglisi gave PolOff an update: Morel tried to organize an initial, "technical" meeting for April 8, but the South Ossetians refused, saying they want to monitor the results of the April 9 protests first. She did not expect any further developments until after the protests.)

13. (C) Puglisi reported that the Russians expressed openness to another round of Geneva talks, although no earlier than the second half of May, after the UN Secretary General issues his report on Georgia on May 15. This would be earlier than the June timeframe mentioned at the February Geneva talks, and before the UN and OSCE mandates both expire in mid-June, but not as early as the co-chairs (and the U.S.) were hoping. The Russian interlocutors told Haber and Morel that the Incident Prevention Mechanism should be in place before the next round is held.

14. (C) In response to a South Ossetian allegation of a buildup of Georgian special forces in Dirbi (southwest of Tskhinvali, just outside the administrative boundary), Janvier reported that the EUMM dispatched a patrol to the area on March 31 and found no evidence of unusual activity. It did find two unnamed COBRA light armored vehicles in nearby Gogeti, but these were well within the limits agreed to in the EUMM's MOU with the Ministry of Internal Affairs. (See additional discussion of COBRAs in paragraph 8.) Puglisi reported that in Moscow, Haber and Morel both pushed

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back hard on Russian allegations of a Georgian military buildup along the administrative boundary lines (ABLs) and of inflammatory statements by Georgian officials. Puglisi explained that the Russians seem to have a different understanding of the "adjacent areas" than the EUMM. According to the EUMM, in the areas closest to the ABL -- i.e., between the first and second rows of Russian checkpoints established after the August war -- only Georgian police are present, no military. In the next zone, which Puglisi described with a new term, the "neighboring area," Georgian military forces are present, but in restricted numbers. Then, in the rest of Georgian-controlled territory, the Georgian military is unrestricted. Such bases as Senaki fall into this third category, and Puglisi suggested that Russian allegations of a "buildup" may count such areas, which in the EUMM's determination are too far from the ABL to give Georgia an offensive capability against the territories.

According to Puglisi, the Russians also criticized the EUMM's MOU with the Georgian MOD, saying it "did not conform to Russian military requirements" and expressed concern that "the Georgians could withdraw from the MOU at any time."

THE BAD NEWS

15. (C) Janvier also reported that local Russian commanders had informed him that Russian troops will be doubled in strength in the Akhagori Valley in preparation for April 9, when the Russians apparently perceive an increased risk for provocation. Replacement troops will be sent into the area, but the current troops that would normally be rotated out will remain; the commanders called these "defensive, not offensive" forces. They did not say what the total numbers would be. Janvier noted that EUMM monitors had also received reports from Georgian Interior Ministry forces of large numbers of military equipment moving from Tskhinvali toward Akhagori on March 30: 25 Ural trucks, 1 T-72 tank, and 4 BMP-2 armored personnel carriers. (Note: The OSCE received similar reports from Georgian police on March 31 and April 1 that may refer to the same movements. On April 1 the OSCE also received reports of recent movements of large numbers of vehicles inside South Ossetia to the southwest of Tskhinvali,

in the Dzvileti-Bagiani-Gobozani area (north of Gogeti) End Note.).

¶6. (C) During the talks in Moscow, Haber raised some specific concerns with Major General Proshkin, Chairman of the CIS Military Department of the Ministry of Defense. He proposed identifying an EUMM staffer as a liaison officer with the Russian military, who could visit Russian counterparts on a regular, perhaps weekly basis; Proshkin did not respond. Haber asked when Russian forces would be leaving Perevi. (Note: Haber has discussed this topic on several occasions with Russian Ambassador to the EU Chizhov, who has acknowledged that Perevi is outside South Ossetia; Haber has agreed to refrain from repeating public calls for the Russians to withdraw, so that the Russians can do so quietly, hoping to minimize embarrassment. Although the EUMM has refrained from public comment on Perevi in recent months, Russia has not withdrawn, and the EUMM seems to be losing its patience. End Note.). Proshkin answered that Perevi holds "strategic importance," and furthermore that Russian forces would have left, if only Georgian forces were not present in the vicinity in "massive numbers." Haber also asked about the vicinity in "massive numbers." Haber also asked about Russian helicopter flights along the ABLs. Without admitting that the flights crossed into undisputed Georgian airspace (both the EUMM and OSCE determined they did), Proshkin acknowledged the flights, explaining them as necessary to monitor the Georgian "military presence."

¶7. (C) A member of Janvier's staff reported that on March 26, an EUMM patrol was sent to investigate reports of shooting in the area of Ditsi, just outside the administrative boundary east of Tskhinvali. Upon arrival, the patrol members heard three bursts of fire pass above their heads. No one else was in the vicinity, so the patrol determined that the shots were aimed at them, most likely intended as a warning, and departed the area.

¶8. (C) The staff member also provided an update on the investigation of the March 29 IED attack (ref D). He described the road where the attack occurred, which leads up a hill to a Georgian Interior Ministry checkpoint, as not a public road, so that a civilian vehicle would be unlikely to use it -- although an EUMM or OSCE monitor vehicle might. Showing a sketch of the road and the placement of the IEDs, he showed how they were clearly designed to function together, first to set off an initial explosion, then to target responders. EUMM and Norwegian People's Aid (a demining NGO) both determined that both IEDs that went off used MON-50 (Claymore-type) anti-personnel mines. Showing a

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photograph of the pickup truck damaged in the first explosion, he demonstrated how the mine's shrapnel tore holes in the unarmored vehicle -- including in the spot where one police officer was fatally wounded. EUMM determined that, if the vehicle had been armored, no one would have died. In response to this incident, the Interior Ministry has begun using COBRA vehicles more widely, including on actual patrols. Janvier acknowledged that, although the EUMM has argued in the past that the COBRAs were unnecessary because none of the previous 11 fatalities could have been prevented by armored vehicles, it could no longer make such an argument.

PLAN FOR APRIL 9

¶9. (C) Although the Interior Ministry had asked the EUMM to help monitor the April 9 protests, and the EUMM was planning on sending four teams, Janvier announced that Brussels decided that monitoring internal political developments was outside the mission's mandate, so the EUMM would not send monitors to the protests themselves. The EUMM has a regular liaison officer at the Interior Ministry, and he will be present in the Ministry on April 9 to observe developments. (Note: The Ministry has invited other diplomatic representatives to be present as well; PolChief will

represent Post. End Note.) EUMM does plan to send extra patrols out to the boundaries on April 9, because many fear that the Georgian Interior Ministry will draw police away from the de facto "boundaries" to monitor the protests, and forces to the north may try to take advantage of the resulting vacuum.

COMMENT: ALL EYES ON APRIL 9

¶10. (C) Russia and South Ossetia's moderate steps toward cooperation are encouraging, but they represent little more than gestures until the Mechanism is actually up and running.

Furthermore, with South Ossetia indicating it will not participate until after April 9, and Russia building up its forces in preparation for April 9, it is clear that we must get past a major hurdle before we can make any real progress.

The decision in Brussels not to monitor the protests is disappointing, because the monitors could have provided a helpful international deterrent to excess by all sides, but the EUMM's extra efforts along the de facto "boundaries" will hopefully have some deterrent effect there.

TEFFT